

Curriculum, Psychology and Society

Krishna Kumar

The author rejects the notion that there are certain time-honoured, proven rules capable of guiding us when we want to prepare a curriculum for children's education and argues that there is no escape from reflecting on the conditions obtaining in our society and culture if we want to give worthwhile education to our children. The problem of curriculum is related to our perception of what kind of society and people we are, and to our vision of the kind of society we want to be. By taking shelter in the 'received' perspective and the 'principles of curriculum development' that it offers, we merely shun our responsibility and allow ourselves to be governed by choices made long ago or elsewhere under very different circumstances.

Whatever we can determine to be worthy of being taught is the proper candidate for inclusion in the curriculum. The obvious issue here is how to determine 'worth'. What kind of value can we put upon different types of knowledge to distinguish between worthy and unworthy kinds from the standpoint of their candidacy for becoming material for educational transaction?

We can distinguish between two routes to solving the problem. The first consists of deciding the worth of what we want to teach in view of the learner. The second consists of determining worth in terms of the intrinsic value of what we want to teach. The author chalks out both these routes and then discusses how satisfactory or otherwise they might prove in solving the problem of curriculum.

FEW people in our country are accustomed to looking at curriculum as a 'problem'—in the sense that it is a matter of imperfect choices and decisions made on the basis of defensible, and therefore challengeable, perceptions. We have an educational culture that is firmly dug into the rock of 'received' knowledge.¹ In such a culture, nobody asks why a certain body of information happens to be equated with education. Under our very different climate and historical circumstances, the influential American curriculum theorist Tyler (1956) would have been happy to find such a large number of people who are used to accepting the validity of one particular structuring of educational knowledge.² Another thing that would have made him happier in India than in his own country is the ease with which dissociation between curriculum and the child's immediate socio-cultural milieu is accepted, and the zeal with which 'principles' for curriculum designing, teacher training, and so on are demanded and applied.

This paper is not about 'principles' but rather the problem of curriculum. Inherent in this declaration is the assumption that there are *no* principles for developing a curriculum. In the dialogue of education, my agenda is to dispel the notion that there are certain time-honoured, proven rules capable of guiding us when we want to prepare a curriculum for children's education. The position I wish to support is the opposite one—that there is no escape from reflecting on the conditions obtaining in our society and culture if we want to give worthwhile education to our children. The problem of curriculum is related to our perception of what kind of society and people we are, and to our vision of the kind of society we want to be. By taking shelter in the 'received' perspective and the 'principles of curriculum development' that it offers, we merely shun our responsibility and allow ourselves to be governed by choices made long ago or elsewhere under very different circumstances.

The problem of curriculum is related to the first of these three key questions to which most of educational research and reflection is addressed:

What is worth teaching?

How should it be taught?

How are the opportunities for education distributed?

Although the three questions are independent and can be pursued by themselves, they are related to each other at a deep level. Until we arrive at that level in this present inquiry, we can pursue the first question—What is worth teaching?—by itself. Whatever we can determine to be worthy of being taught is the proper candidate for inclusion in the curriculum. The obvious issue here is how to determine 'worth'. What kind of value can we put upon different types of knowledge to distinguish between worthy and unworthy kinds as far as their candidacy for becoming material for educational transaction?

We can distinguish between two routes to solving the problem. The first consists of deciding the worth of what we want to teach in view of the learner. The second consists of determining worth in terms of the intrinsic value of what we want to teach, I intend to chalk out both these routes, and then to decide how satisfactory or otherwise they might prove in solving the problem of curriculum as I have defined it above.

I

Route One: Learner's Viewpoint

It makes immediate sense to assess the worth of something we are about to give by taking into account the receiver's viewpoint. Education is something that adults want to give to children, so what could be better than judging the worth of what we want to teach in terms of children's own perception of it? The analogy of gift is obvious; when we are about to give a gift, we often choose the gift by considering the receiver's personality, likes and needs. Attractive though the analogy is,

applying it to education has obvious difficulties. One arises out of the fact that education is not for just one child. Hundreds, in fact, millions of children may be involved. So we will not get very far by considering the likes and needs of each child. Most likely, we will have to be content with a generalised understanding of children's personalities.

The second difficulty in applying the gift metaphor to education arises from the very nature of the knowledge that we as adults might possess about children. As adults, we may be able to think, to some extent, on behalf of children, but we cannot totally submerge ourselves in the child's point of view. I may be charged with mystifying childhood, but I feel it is important to remember that the ability to look at things from the child's viewpoint is a special kind of ability. There is evidence to say that for adults to have this ability may require a cultural context. In the West, such a context was created by the availability of Rousseau's reflections on individuality and freedom when industrialisation caused the need for child care and the possibility of child survival and health (Aries, 1962) (January 1973).

The point is that although it is appropriate to determine the worth of what we want to teach in terms of the child's perspective, it may be extraordinarily difficult for us adults to take the child's perspective in the matter we are considering.³ Three reasons for this difficulty may be distinguished. First, children are interested in *all* kinds of things or can develop interest in just about any form of knowledge, depending on how it is presented to them. So, what is worth teaching and what is not are not particularly relevant questions from children's point of view. Secondly, children cannot be expected to articulate their view of the worth of something as abstract as knowledge. Put simply, as Donaldson (1978) does, "the young child is not capable of deciding for himself what he should learn; he is quite simply too ignorant!" At best, what children

can be normally expected to articulate is liking or preference, and this brings us to the third reason, namely, the likings expressed by children keep changing as they grow older. Therefore, it cannot provide us with a reliable basis for making sustainable decisions about what we should teach them.

Going by the first route then, our best chances lie in agreeing to think *on behalf* of children rather than in trying to find out what they think. Now if we agree on this more modest possibility, we can soon identify one basic sense in which 'worth' can be determined: it is worth teaching something only if it can be learnt'. I am referring to 'worth' in the sense of being worthy of the bother of teaching. This is admittedly a rather pedestrian sense of worth, but nevertheless a useful one, for it can protect us from putting in a lot of wasteful effort of which we can find numerous examples today. The mismatch between what modern child psychology tells us about how children learn on one hand, and the expectations embedded in school curricula on the other, is so sharp and violent in our country that it looks an exercise in redundancy to identify little examples. Indeed, the danger of giving single examples is that people in charge of curriculum planning might respond by acknowledging these as lapses and remove them, leaving the edifice of an unlearnable curriculum intact.

The example I will discuss here belongs to the early phase of school learning when the distinction between knowledge and skill is a hard one to make. Learning basic skills, such as reading, involves the translation of several discrete kinds of knowledge into a gestalt of readily available responses. Learning how to read requires the child to apply his knowledge of the world, people, and language to construct a highly dynamic system of decoding graphic signs. Recent research in the pedagogy of reading⁴ tells us that the success of reading instruction depends on the encouragement given to children to use their prior knowledge of language (in its oral form) and the world to decode printed texts meaningfully. In the light of this research, the alphabet-centred instruction given in Indian primary schools, and the lack of incentives for children to use their hypothesis-forming ability, discourage children's search for meaning. Repeated failure to make sense of what they are reading damages the self-concept of many children, leading them to drop out of school.⁵ Of the others who do learn to read, many become mechanical readers—in the sense that they can scan a printed page but cannot associate the text with their own experiences. Only if reading were taught in a manner in which it could be learnt would the wastage in our enormous effort to impart primary education be minimised. At present, only the exceptionally persistent or motivated children are able to relate to the text, that is, to read in a meaningful way.

Psychology and pedagogy, thus, can help us organise and teach knowledge and skills in effective ways. This is a significant contribution towards solving the problem of curriculum, but one that can be appreciated only after a decision has been made about the kinds of things that are worth teaching in the first place. In other words, psychology or pedagogy cannot tell us what to teach, only when and how. Psychology can tell us even less about the validity of combining different kinds of knowledge under one school subject.⁶ The choice of knowledge and the manner of structuring it have to be determined on some other grounds. If we wanted to decide whether it would be a good idea to introduce 'folklore' as a compulsory school subject at the primary stage, no amount of psychological or pedagogical knowledge would help us take this decision. The decision has to do with our perception of the place of folklore in our socio-cultural milieu. It requires reflection on our cultural choices, the socio-economic underpinnings of these choices, and on the implications of the choice of folklore as a school subject for all children. But once the decision to teach folklore has been taken, we can refer to child psychology and pedagogy to determine how to break up folklore into learnable and enjoyable sequences and what kind of teaching would most suit this new subject.

II

Route Two: Value of Knowledge

Now let us turn to the second route which consists of examining the worth of what we want to teach in terms of its intrinsic value. The word 'intrinsic' is difficult to interpret, and it can easily land us in trouble if we are not careful. I have used it to characterise a route of inquiry which would be distinct from the first route which involved ascertaining the worth of knowledge from the child's perspective. Our brief inquiry revealed that this route presents enormous difficulties beyond a particular point—the point at which one can separate knowledge that *can* be learnt (by a child at a specific stage of her development) from knowledge that *cannot* be learnt. Beyond this, Route One has little help to offer. Route Two differs from this inquiry in that it does not refer to the child. What we are after is the possibility of identifying something intrinsically valuable in the knowledge we want to impart—something that would qualify it to be in the curriculum under the only condition that it is learnable (i.e., the condition that Route One has taught us to respect for its usefulness).

On the face of it, the kind of inquiry we are making looks like the inquiry philosophers are known to make by asking—What is true knowledge?'. What they want to know in that question is: What is real knowledge as opposed to spurious knowledge? Supposing a philosopher could answer this question, would it be of use to us as teachers of

children? Again, in rather too obvious a sense one would say 'yes'. If someone could convincingly distinguish true from false knowledge, surely no one would like to teach false knowledge. The problem arises when we recognise that unlike philosophical inquiry, education 'is a mundane business. Whereas philosophy is supposedly concerned with the pursuit of truth or true knowledge, education is mostly concerned with people, particularly people as parents, their aspirations (collectively expressed by the institutions they support), and with the social reality which shapes these aspirations. Education deals with knowledge in a rather limited context, which is defined by the social reality of a particular period and locale, Mannheim, I believe, was right in pointing out that the aims of education could only be historically grasped simply because they were shaped by history and therefore changed from one period and society to the next (Mannheim, 1962).

Despite its interest in 'truth', education deals not so much with true knowledge (even if such a thing could be ascertained and acknowledged by all) as with how knowledge is perceived in a given social milieu. However much teachers, many of whom may be inspired by ideals of one kind or the other, may want to train children to distinguish truth from falsehood, they can only do so within the context of what has been perceived and installed in the curricula as worthwhile knowledge. Crudely speaking, they are in schools to teach what *counts* as knowledge. And what counts as knowledge is a reconstruction, based on selection, under given social circumstances. Out of the total body of knowledge available to human beings, not all is ever treated as worthy of being passed on to the next generation through schools. Some of it gets transmitted to the next generation; the rest waits in appropriate archives for either oblivion or resurrection under changed circumstances. This is, of course, a generalisation, for we know that 'society' is hardly a unitary system in the matter we are dealing with. At some point below, we will have to treat this matter more carefully, and examine how the composition of society, and the corresponding composition of the structure of educational opportunities, affect the choices of what is taught, in schools.

For the time being, however, the generalisation that school knowledge is a reconstruction, involving selection of knowledge, should suffice for us. It can help us recognise the wide-ranging interaction involved in the process of reconstruction of knowledge. The interaction involves creation, codification, distribution, and reception, and it takes place under the shaping influence of economy, politics, and culture. What knowledge becomes available at schools for distribution has to do with the overall classification of knowledge and power in society. Schools supply individuals whose knowledge and

skills are appropriate for the tasks generated by the economy and supported by politics and culture. Schools are able to supply such individuals with the help of appropriate reconstructions of knowledge. The 'star warrior' delineated by Broad⁷ is not a product of fortuitous circumstances. He is as unmistakable a product of America's contemporary politics, economy, and culture, as was the member of the Indian Civil Service a product of colonial India in the early twentieth century. The role of the American and the Indian educational systems in producing these archetypes is fully examinable in terms of the reconstructions of knowledge that the two systems are based on.

Operating under the influence of economy, politics, and culture, the system of education sullies knowledge with associations of various kinds. Each association is like a watermark—it cannot be rubbed off, for the agencies that leave the mark are more powerful than, indeed beyond the control of, education. By studying educational systems in the context of social and economic history we can find several examples of such associations. Let me examine two of them, the first one relating to science. India's exposure to the West under colonial rule contextualised science within the dynamic of colonisation. Due to its association with colonisation by a western society, science became the target of xenophobia in many quarters of the anti-colonial consciousness and struggle. Apathy to science, or worse still, suspicion of science and hostility towards it grew as part of nationalist consciousness. Baran (1957) cites the opposite case of Japan; "its being spared the mass invasion of western fortune hunters, soldiers, sailors, and 'civilisers' saved it also from the extremes of xenophobia which so markedly retarded the spread of western science in other countries of Asia" (p 160). To gain entry into the Indian school curriculum, science had to make a hard struggle, and even though it now has a secure place, it covers only a narrow spectrum of the activities permitted in the school. Basically, the culture of Indian schools remains hostile to science. If, for the sake of brevity, I describe the culture of science as that of touching, manipulating, personally observing, and making sense, then the culture of our schools could well be described by counterposing all these. Fear of science and all that it stands for continues to be embedded in our school culture and curriculum; why it is not openly expressed is a different matter.

Gandhi's proposal for 'basic education' offers another example of the influence of the sociology of knowledge on the school curriculum. An important aspect of his proposal was the introduction of local crafts and productive skills in the school. In functional terms, the idea was to relate the school to the processes of production in the local milieu, with the declared aim of making the school itself a productive institution. Gandhi

thought that the elementary school could not possibly get very far in a poor society if it did not produce a substantial part of its own needs (Avinashilingam, 1960). But, apart from this functional aspect (the practicality of which has been debated), the proposal for basic education also had a symbolic aspect to which considerably less attention has been given. Symbolically, by proposing to introduce local crafts and production-related skills and knowledge in the school, Gandhi was proposing allocation of a substantive place in the school curriculum to systems of knowledge developed by, and associated with, oppressed groups of Indian society, namely artisans, peasants, and cleaners. It was no less than a proposal for a revolution in the sociology of school knowledge. For centuries, the curriculum had confined itself to the knowledge and skills associated with the dominant castes. Basic education was proposing a subtle plan to carve a room for the knowledge associated with the lower castes, including the lowest. In a truly 'basic' school, children were expected to clean toilets (Sykes, 1948). Effective implementation of basic education would have seriously disturbed the prevailing hierarchy of the different monopolies of knowledge in our caste society. In truly functioning basic schools—and they would have been common schools—the cultural capital of the upper castes would not have carried the stamp of total validity as appropriate school knowledge.

The association between certain forms of knowledge and certain social groups is of importance to education because it characterises the very image of the educated man prevalent in a society in one particular phase of its history. As a result of this association education becomes synonymous with certain areas of knowledge and certain other corresponding areas of ignorance. Let me use an example from my own daily behaviour as an educated man, not quite what is known as the 'westernised' Indian, but sufficiently so to be incapable of using the indigenous names of months. My illiterate maid servant uses the Indian calendar and has little knowledge of the western calendar. We often have considerable difficulty determining whether we have understood each other. As an uneducated person she expects that I won't know the system she is used to; conversely, I as an educated person expect that she might know only the Indian system. Our ignorance of each other's calendars contributes to our identities as educated and uneducated persons. It so happens, obviously due to the economic and political dynamics of our society, that ignorance of her system is an attribute of my image as an educated man. I am *not* supposed to know whether Sawan comes first or Aghan. On the contrary, her ignorance of the western calendar is a proof of her lack of education because knowledge of the Indian calendar is not one of the attributes of the educated Indian in

post-colonial India. She is from a lower caste background which I am not. The kind of knowledge she has is associated in post-colonial India with the poor and the illiterate. Brahmin priests using the Indian calendar for specific ritual jobs do not disturb this association, for in using the Indian calendar they are not acting in their capacity as modern educated men, but in their capacity and from their status as Brahmin priests.

In every age, the educated man is defined differently, according to the associations that areas of knowledge and corresponding areas of ignorance have with different social groups. Dominance and distribution of the power to define roles play a significant part in determining the attributes which the educated man will be expected to possess. Thus, the problem of determining the worth of a form of knowledge, to a certain extent, arises out of the distribution of knowledge in society. The distribution of knowledge at a particular point of time may itself be an indicator of the distribution of the opportunities to be educated in a previous period and of the content and character of education in that period. For someone who wants to make a curriculum, the question is: 'Out of the prevailing forms of knowledge, which ones will I choose?' A related question is: 'On what basis will I choose?' It is this latter question that we have been pursuing along Route Two, and we have found that the educational worth of a certain form of knowledge cannot be determined according to some purely intrinsic characteristics of the knowledge in question. We have seen how important a role do symbolic associations play in shaping the perception of knowledge in society.

III

Need and Character of Deliberation

On the basis of this inquiry along the two routes, I wish to argue that the problem of curriculum cannot be dealt with as an act of social engineering. It is an act of deliberation. In a society like ours where material capital and the cultural capital associated with education are so inequally distributed, curricular deliberation cannot escape conflict. How shall this conflict be resolved? Any deliberation is based on the assumption that no voice will be wiped out. Were it possible to wipe out a voice, the problem of finding room for it in education would not arise. Indeed, the contrary is more important: that in a polity where no voice can be expressly wiped out, education may offer a useful means to phase out certain voices or to make them inaudible. Dominant groups may use education, more specifically the curriculum, to see to it that voices other than their own are represented so inadequately, feebly, or distortedly, that they would develop a negative appeal and gradually lend themselves to be phased out as candidates

for room in curricular deliberation. None of this needs be a conscious process; it may actually be a quiet, civilised dynamic of dominance. Agreeing to perceive curriculum as an act and product of deliberation, rather than a given, rational construct, is by itself a good preparation for enervating the dynamic.

The failure of education to reach the oppressed groups in our society is directly related to this dynamic. It is easy to lay the blame for this failure at the door of poor motivation among the backward and administrative inefficiency. These are the culprits whose faces we have grown accustomed to seeing smeared in educational debates. But the failure also offers us evidence of the inadequacy and narrowness of curriculum deliberation in our society. Curriculum designing for the school stage is the charge of the bureaucracy of education which includes the quasi-bureaucracy of the state-controlled institutions of pedagogical research and training. It has never been treated as an act of deliberation. Inquiry into the structures of knowledge embedded in the prevailing curriculum has never been on the agenda. The task of reorganising the structures of knowledge, and the related task of reorganising the perspective from which knowledge will be represented have not been perceived as important tasks.

Curriculum deliberation is a social dialogue—the wider its reach, the stronger its grasp of the social conditions in which education is to function. The only way to expand the reach of curriculum deliberation is to include teachers in it, and this is where the problem of curriculum encounters its greatest challenge in the culture of education in India. In this culture, the teacher is a subordinate officer. He is not expected to have a voice, only expertise. What little curriculum deliberation does take place in the higher circles of educational power remains extremely poor on account of the absence of the teacher's voice. But this is not a plea merely for the involvement of a greater number of people in curriculum deliberation. Numbers matter, but more important is the capacity of a deliberation to be sensitive to the dialogues going on in the wider society. Judging the differential importance of specific dialogues and determining the stance education ought to take towards a dialogue are difficult tasks, but shunning them would mean permitting the curriculum to remain aloof from the concerns of the wider society. This is the situation we are in and have been for a long time.⁸ Issues that our society is grappling with find no reflection or trace in the school's daily curriculum. The knowledge imparted in the classroom transcends all living concerns that children as members of the society might have, as well as all other concerns that the adult members of society

have and which will affect children. This kind of transcendental curriculum is not just wasteful, for it does not use the opportunity the school provides for imparting useful knowledge; it is destructive too, for it promotes a kind of schizophrenia. The educated man produced by a transcendental curriculum sees and seeks to establish no relation between his education and his personal life and conduct. A colonial educationist, Mayhew, had noted this feature of our education system sixty years ago: "When the educated Indian is most himself, in the expression of his deepest emotion, and in the domestic or communal enjoyment of his leisure, he shows the least trace of what our schools and colleges have given him" (Mayhew, 1926: p 207).

Modern pedagogical planning, particularly since independence, has attempted to bypass rather than remedy the dissociation between our schools and our society. The means of bypass was psychologism, which consists of the claim that the broad principles of children's psychology are adequate basis for developing suitable curricula and materials. We have seen earlier that psychology can at best provide a limited answer to the problem of curriculum. But one school of psychologism needs to be examined in special, for it has virtually ruled the minds of many of our avowedly modern and scientifically oriented institutions of pedagogical research and planning, particularly since the sixties. The school I am referring to is that of 'behavioural objectives' of education schematised in a taxonomy by Bloom (1956).⁹ Followers of this school argue that the objectives of curriculum and teaching need only be defined in behavioural terms, such as 'analysing', 'translating', or 'Inferring'. What knowledge content is used to achieve these behavioural aims is immaterial. The idea is to allow the child to develop skills that can be used in relation to any content or situation. This view of curriculum is often called the 'process model', for it emphasises the process of learning more than the content, i.e., how something is learnt rather than what is learnt. Clearly, the model denies the problem we have been discussing, namely the problem of identifying worthwhile knowledge in relation to the milieu, particularly the socio-cultural milieu of the child. It promises a technical means to transcend the milieu, and it legitimises such transcendence in the name of effective instruction. The model had obvious appeal for Indian educationists who had been accustomed, since the beginning of colonial policies in education, to seeing the socio-cultural milieu as an obstruction rather than an asset for education. The behavioural model came here during the sixties, the so-called 'development decade', when Indian planners were eagerly looking towards the West, particularly towards America, to find technical solutions to all

kinds of problems.

The promise of the behavioural brand of psychologism is a deceptive one, as Daniels (1975) has already shown and I will elaborate below on Daniels's critique. The fault lies in ignoring the nature of action concepts. Actions or behaviours (e.g., obeying, analysing, etc) do not have a one-to-one relationship with certain acts. An act of obeying may be altogether different in its motivation, aim, and implications from another act of obeying, depending on the circumstances under which the act has to be performed. To use Daniels's term, action concepts are polymorphous in that they stand in superordinate relationship to subordinate acts. Many different kinds of acts or behaviours can be accommodated under the label 'obeying' or 'analysing'; and these same acts can be classified under other action concepts. This is how labels like loyalty, 'discipline', and Service came so handy to educational planners of Hitler's Germany. By merely using behavioural labels to characterise the intended curriculum, we do not solve the basic problem of curriculum formulation, but evade it at an enormous risk of distortion of the aims of education that we may have in mind. Only by examining the intentions of the learner, the conditions under which learning has to occur, and the means or conventions of teaching to be used can we ascertain what precisely will happen.

This is how the problem of curriculum is related to the distribution of educational opportunities and to methods of teaching. The distribution of opportunities for learning in a society is an important factor influencing both how 'worth' of a certain kind of knowledge is perceived or weighed and how knowledge that is regarded as worthy of being taught will be represented in educational materials. We can take for granted that the knowledge produced and possessed by groups whose access to education is poor will not be regarded as worthy of being taught in schools. Who would regard, for example, the knowledge of the Baiga myth of the world's creation as worthwhile educational knowledge? For that matter, even the knowledge of animal behaviour that the Baiga have acquired over a lengthy acquaintance with the jungle of central parts of India is unlikely to be regarded as worthwhile educational knowledge. Room for Baiga mythology in educationally valid knowledge required of Indian children is linked to the Baiga's own access to education and their educational performance. Baiga children have poor access to opportunities for education. Moreover, the Baiga child's chances of doing well in the education system are also very poor, at least partly because the Baiga worldview has no resonance in the school curriculum.¹⁰ The school is the outpost of an alien culture and system of knowledge in a Baiga village.

How the method of teaching affects the

character of what is taught can be seen in science. The distinctness of science as a school subject comes from the need for experimentation by the learner. Of course it is possible to teach science without experimentation, but then it loses its distinctness. If distinctness is a criterion for considering an area of knowledge as a separate subject at school, then there is no point in teaching science as, say, literature. As a subject that demands experimentation and independent inquiry by the learner, science is associated with freedom of judgment and equality between the student and the teacher in the presence of objective facts. Science education is supposed to be conducive to secular values precisely because it makes ascribed authority redundant. But if science is taught in a traditional manner, with the authority of the textbook and the teacher's word, and without opportunity for experimentation, it would cease to have a secular character and value. Once it loses its original character owing to the application of conventional pedagogies, science can well become an instrument for authoritarian control in the classroom, and later on in society. The practice of science in a context that does not permit equality or open questioning can potentially lead pupils into imbibing values that are antithetical to science.

And not just the character of what is taught, but the volume of content too is affected by the methods of teaching. For some time now, a favourite theme among curriculum developers in India has been the 'load' or volume of content described in the syllabus for each grade level. Despite the acknowledgement by the highest body of educational research that the 'load' has become excessive (NCERT, 1985), no solution by way of actually cutting down the load is forthcoming. I feel no solution is likely to be found for the simple reason that the problem is being diagnosed wrongly. The problem of volume of content at any grade level does *not* originate in the so-called 'explosion of knowledge' which is frequently referred to in our country in discussions of curriculum. It originates in methods of teaching. If it is assumed that lectures and occasional demonstration (in subjects associated with science) by the teacher will remain the most commonly used methods, a remarkably large amount of 'load' of content can be accommodated at each grade level. With this assumption we can go on packing our syllabi tighter and tighter, all the time seeking justification in the explosion of knowledge with which 'we' as a backward country have to cope. This process of mistaken action and legitimisation of action can stop only if we recognise that teaching methods other than the lecture and demonstration method would demand longer and more leisurely interaction between the teacher and pupils which is possible only with less content to cover in

each interaction.

Such a conclusion could also be reached via the route of psychological awareness regarding the learner, something I have discussed earlier. How much the learner can learn is an aspect of what she can learn at any given stage of her cognitive development. Although such knowledge can only be acquired from psychology, it is not easy to apply it in curriculum and education, for application depends not just on knowledge but also on our willingness to respect this kind of knowledge. Moreover, understanding of child psychology is one thing, using it to modify our perception of what is worthwhile knowledge in view of our reflection on our own socio-cultural condition is quite another. Our attitude towards children comes somewhere midway between these two. It is rooted in our culture, history, and the material conditions of our society which determine that 47 per cent of all deaths each year are deaths of young children (UNICEF, 1984). Given the precarious state of the child's existence in our midst, and a socio-economic environment which persuades us to look at the child as a small adult, the lessons of psychology are not easy to apply.

Notes

[This is a substantially expanded and somewhat modified version of my presentation at a seminar held in April 1986 at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. I wish to thank the participants, particularly Anil Sadgopal and Alok Rai, for their comments.]

- 1 For distinction between the 'received' and a 'dynamic' perspective on curriculum, see Eggleston (1977). Basically, the 'received' perspective is derived from an *a priori* view of knowledge, whereas the 'dynamic' perspective—the one used in this paper—places knowledge in a sociological context and inquires into its legitimacy.
- 2 Tyler's influence extended worldwide, and it is not unusual to come across post-graduate students and professors of education in India to this day who mouth Tyler's definition of education without attributing it to him by name. The definition, which squarely places education and curriculum in the domain of psychology, is: "Education is a process of changing the behaviour patterns of people." The emphasis Tyler placed on behaviour blossomed in the taxonomy of objectives prepared by Benjamin Bloom which continues to be referred to in India in learned pedagogical discourse. Also, see note 9 below.
- 3 The difficulty does not, of course, prevent the use of the term 'child-centred' as a cliché to legitimise some new programme or material. Like many other terms used in political and developmental discourse, 'child-centred education' has been imported from Europe and is now freely used in India without least reference to or worry about the material and cultural conditions under

which it emerged. For a discussion of the origins of the child-centred perspective in western education and literature, see Aries (1962) and Brooks (1969).

- 4 For a brief survey of this research, see Moon (1984). Most of the recent work on reading is based on psycholinguistics. It is interesting that the insights which the application of psycholinguistics has provided correspond to the conclusions reached independently by people like Sylvia Ashton-Warner and Bruno Bettelheim through their own experiences.
- 5 For understandable reasons, this reason is seldom cited in dropout research. For a reconstruction of how this might happen in the life of one child, see Kumar (1986a).
- 6 Consider, for example, the combination of history, geography, and civics under 'social studies'. This combination acquires its legitimacy from the modern understanding of the social sciences, but the construction of knowledge taught under civics in Indian schools is based neither on psychology nor social science, but rather on the colonial perception of the native. For a discussion of the development of the civics curriculum under colonial rule, see Mayhew (1926).
- 7 In a review of *Star Warriors* by W J Broad, Altbach (1986) says: "Broad's scientific warriors are your typical computer nerds found on any college campus. They are brilliant scientists trained at the best schools in the country such as MIT and Cal Tech, but they have little sense of politics and little education beyond physics, computer science and other technological areas. They live in a self-contained universe of top-secret clearances, high level science and a feeling that somehow it is all a technological game that can supply America with a technological 'fix' that can protect us from the Russians." The 'Star Warriors' studied by Broad are the scientists who are actually involved in the Star Wars programme.
- 8 How this situation is reified in the 'textbook culture' that dominates the Indian education system, see Kumar (1986b).
- 9 The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) was established in the early sixties. Many of its pedagogues were trained in the United States at the time when Bloom's behavioural objectives were extremely popular there. Bloom's taxonomy of behavioural objectives is dedicated to Ralph Tyler whose book on curriculum development has been widely used as a textbook for students of pedagogy in both America and India.
- 10 For a study and discussion of the situation in which a tribal child is placed when confronted by a lesson that denies or distorts his worldview, see Kumar (1983).

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ATTENTION TAX PAYERS

Do not hold back your
true income/wealth
**IF YOU DO NOT HEED NOW, YOU
MAY HAVE TO REPENT**

**The Income-tax Department has extended the
Amnesty Scheme till 31.3.1987.**

If you have failed to disclose your full and true income or
suppressed or undervalued your wealth for assessment year
1986-87 or earlier years.

you have the opportunity to turn over a new leaf and
BEFORE YOU ARE CAUGHT IN THE NET

voluntarily disclose your income or wealth fully and truly and
pay tax promptly under section 140-A of the Income-tax Act
and/or Section 15B of the Wealth-tax Act on the rates applica-
ble to the years in which concealment was done whether the
assessments for those years are completed or pending. **THERE
WILL BE NO PENALTY, NO PROSECUTION NOR ANY ROV-
ING ENQUIRIES WHEN YOU DO SO.**

However, the immunity will not extend to the penal consequen-
ces of late filing of return for the assessment year 1986-87

**AVOID PENALTY, PROSECUTION, ROVING
ENQUIRIES AND HUMILIATION**

Hurry up ! Last Date is 31st March 1987.

In case of difficulty contact the Commissioner of
Income-tax or your ITO/PRO



INCOME TAX DEPARTMENT
Directorate of Inspection
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New Delhi-110 001

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